

Psalms

Lessons of the Past

Lesson #10 for March 9, 2024

Scriptures: Psalm 78; 80; 105; 106, 135; Galatians 3:29; Numbers 6:22-27.

1. Are there lessons that we can learn from history? Are we doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past if we fail to study our prior failures and learn from those errors?

[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] In numerous psalms, praise takes the form of narrating the Lord's mighty acts of salvation. These psalms are often called "**salvation history psalms**" or "**historical psalms.**" Some appeal to God's people, telling them to learn from their history, particularly from their mistakes and the mistakes of their ancestors. Certain historical psalms contain a predominant hymnal note that highlights God's past wonderful deeds on behalf of God's people and that strengthen their trust in the Lord, who is able and faithful to deliver them from their present hardships.

The special appeal of the historical psalms is that they help us to see our lives as part of the history of God's people and to claim that past as our own. As we have been adopted into the family of the historic people of God through Christ (*Rom. 8:15; Rom. 9:24–26; Gal. 4:6, 7*), **the historical heritage of the ancient people of Israel is indeed the account of our spiritual ancestry.** Therefore, we can and should learn from their past, which is ours, as well.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath Afternoon, March 2.^{†§}

2. In several of his letters, Paul picked up the theme that we are talking about and reminded us that in God's eyes every one of us who is a faithful follower becomes a part of the descendants of Abraham and can call out to God as *our Father*. (*Romans 8:15; 9:24-26; Galatians 4:6-7*)
3. We are supposed to recognize that each generation of people is intended to add something to the story of the great controversy. Multiple psalms in the book talk about marvelous things that God has done for His people in the past. Some main focuses include the plagues on Egypt, the exodus, the entrance into the land of Canaan, and conquering the enemies there.
4. But, they also recognize how unfaithful the people almost always were. By contrast, they ask us to look back at the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. God is praised for caring for the children of Israel through their wilderness wanderings. He gave them manna from heaven and water out of a rock. They ate angels' food. But, as time went by, they turned away from God and then, some of them died and suddenly others recognized that they needed to turn back to Him. The reformation did not last very long.
5. In Psalm 78 the plagues on Egypt are mentioned in considerable detail.
6. But, not all stories are ideal! The psalmist mentioned that the covenant box, the ark of the Lord, was captured by the Philistines because it was taken into battle by the sons of Eli.
7. One of the great times in Israelite history was during the reign of David. The psalmist called people to look back to the good times.

8. In the Psalms, stories are used similar to how Jesus used parables to teach important lessons. But, despite God's unending love and abundant forgiveness, the children of Israel kept turning against Him; they rebelled and forgot His covenant with them.
9. What have we learned from our own personal experiences with God? Why did it take so long for the Israelites to realize that whenever they followed God's advice, things worked out perfectly. However, when they departed from His advice, disaster struck them.
10. In Psalm 105, the psalmist moved back further in history to talk about the experiences of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. He reminded them that from the deepest levels of poverty, famine, and want, some of them rose to the highest levels in government. Joseph and Moses are discussed in some detail. Read **Psalm 105**.

[BSG:] Psalm 105 recalls key events that shaped the covenantal relationship between the Lord and His people Israel. It focuses on God's covenant with Abraham to give the Promised Land to him and his descendants, and how this promise, confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, was providentially fulfilled through Joseph, Moses, and Aaron, and in the time of the conquest of Canaan. The psalm gives hope to God's people in all generations because God's marvelous works in the past guarantee God's unchanging love to His people in all times (*Ps. 105:1–5, 7, 8*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, March 4.†§

11. Psalm 105 is an important lesson, encouraging us to look at the stories of the great patriarchs of the past, such as Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, and emulate their examples.
12. But, the psalmists also remind us that God's promises are for people throughout the earth. Paul picked up this theme in Galatians 3:28-29.

Galatians 3:28-29: ²⁸ So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Galatians 3:28-29). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].††

13. It should be clear that in God's eyes, there is no such thing as bias.
14. In Psalm 106 we are reminded of other details of the exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the craving for meat with its related terrible disease. He also mentioned the earth swallowing up of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. The Psalmist also mentioned the golden calf. And he reminded them that God told that entire generation over the age of 20 that they were to die in the desert because of their rebellion.
15. He reminded them of the terrible tendency the children of Israel had to slip into the pagan fertility cult religions that were popular around them. And in two different places in Psalms, he talked about those who made and worshipped idols, and the fact that they became like the idols that they were making. (See Psalm 115 and Psalm 135.) Do we have idols?
16. Read **Psalm 106**.

[BSG:] Psalm 106 also evokes the major events in Israel's history, including the Exodus, sojourn in the wilderness, and life in Canaan. It stresses the heinous sins of the fathers that culminated in the generation that was carried into exile. Thus, the psalm almost certainly was written when the nation was in Babylon, or after they had returned home, and the psalmist, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recounted for God's people these historical incidents and the lessons that the people should have learned from them.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, March 5.‡

17. In Psalm 106, the psalmist reminded the children of Israel that their behavior was no better than that of their forefathers. The main problem being that they did not seem to have learned anything from their forefathers' bad examples. And what about us? How much more evidence do we have? What are we doing with that evidence?

18. Read Psalm 80 which recounts the **parable of the Lord's vineyard**.

[BSG:] How are God's people portrayed in this psalm [Psalm 80], and what great hope do they plead for?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, March 6.‡

Psalm 80:4-19: How much longer, LORD God Almighty, will you be angry with your people's prayers?

⁵ You have given us sorrow to eat,
a large cup of tears to drink.

⁶ **You let the surrounding nations fight over our land;**
our enemies insult us. ⁷ Bring us back, Almighty God!

Show us your mercy, and we will be saved! ⁸ You brought a grapevine out of Egypt;
you drove out other nations and planted it in their land.

⁹ You cleared a place for it to grow;
its roots went deep, and it spread out over the whole land.

¹⁰ It covered the hills with its shade;
its branches overshadowed the giant cedars.

¹¹ It extended its branches to the Mediterranean Sea
and as far as the River Euphrates.

¹² Why did you break down the fences round it?
Now anyone passing by can steal its grapes;

¹³ wild pigs trample it down,
and wild animals feed on it. ¹⁴ Turn to us, Almighty God!
Look down from heaven at us;
come and save your people!

¹⁵ **Come and save this grapevine that you planted,
this young vine you made grow so strong!** ¹⁶ Our enemies have set it on fire
and cut it down;

look at them in anger and destroy them!

¹⁷ Preserve and protect the people you have chosen,
the nation you made so strong.

¹⁸ We will never turn away from you again;
keep us alive, and we will praise you.

¹⁹ **Bring us back, LORD God Almighty.**

Show us your mercy, and we will be saved.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

[BSG:] Israel is portrayed as a vineyard that God uprooted from Egypt, the land of oppression, and transported to the Promised Land of abundance. The image of a vineyard conveys God's election of Israel and His providential care (*read also Gen. 49:11, 12, 22; and Deut. 7:7–11*).

However, in Psalm 80, God's vineyard is under His wrath (*Ps. 80:12*). The prophets announce the vineyard's destruction as the sign of God's judgment because the vine has turned bad (*Isa. 5:1–7, Jer. 2:21*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Wednesday, March 6.^{‡§}

Isaiah 5:1-7: ¹ Listen while I sing you this song,
a song of my friend and his vineyard:

My friend had a vineyard

on a very fertile hill.

² He dug the soil and cleared it of stones;
he planted the finest vines.

He built a tower to guard them,
dug a pit for treading the grapes.

He waited for the grapes to ripen,
but every grape was sour.

³ So now my friend says, "You people who live in Jerusalem and Judah, judge between my vineyard and me. ⁴Is there anything I failed to do for it? **Then why did it produce sour grapes and not the good grapes I expected?**

⁵ "This is what I am going to do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge round it, break down the wall that protects it, and let wild animals eat it and trample it down. ⁶I will let it be overgrown with weeds. I will not prune the vines or hoe the ground; instead I will let briars and thorns cover it. I will even forbid the clouds to let rain fall on it."

⁷ **Israel is the vineyard of the LORD Almighty;**

the people of Judah are the vines he planted.

He expected them to do what was good,
but instead they committed murder.

He expected them to do what was right,
but their victims cried out for justice.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

[BSG:] However, Psalm 80 does not ponder over the reasons for divine judgment. Given the depths of God's grace, the psalmist is perplexed that God

can withhold His presence from His people for such an extended time. The tension between God's wrath and judgment, on the one hand, and God's grace and forgiveness, on the other, causes the psalmist to fear that divine wrath may prevail and consume the people completely (*Ps. 80:16*).

19. Let us turn our attention to Psalm 135.

Psalm 135:3-21:

³ Praise the LORD, because he is good;
sing praises to his name, because he is kind.

⁴ He chose Jacob for himself,
the people of Israel for his own.

⁵ I know that our LORD is great,
greater than all the gods.

⁶ He does whatever he wishes
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and in the depths below.

⁷ **He brings storm clouds from the ends of the earth;
he makes lightning for the storms,
and he brings out the wind from his storeroom.**

⁸ **In Egypt he killed all the firstborn
of people and animals alike.**

⁹ **There he performed miracles and wonders
to punish the king and all his officials.**

¹⁰ **He destroyed many nations
and killed powerful kings:**

¹¹ **Sihon, king of the Amorites,
Og, king of Bashan,
and all the kings in Canaan.**

¹² **He gave their lands to his people;
he gave them to Israel....;**

¹⁵ **The gods of the nations are made of silver and gold;
they are formed by human hands.**

¹⁶ **They have mouths, but cannot speak,
and eyes, but cannot see.**

¹⁷ **They have ears, but cannot hear;
they are not even able to breathe.**

¹⁸ **May all who made them and who trust in them
become like the idols they have made! ...**

²¹ Praise the LORD in Zion,

in Jerusalem, his home. Praise the LORD!—*Good News Bible*.*†

20. In Psalm 135, the psalmist reminds us that God has full control the forces of nature. He guided the children of Israel in the defeat of all the kings of the Amorites. And although those kings were giants and seemed to be invincible, they were easy prey for God when the children of Israel followed His directions for battle. Thus, Psalm 135 praises God for delivering his people from Egypt and helping them to conquer their enemies in Canaan.
21. God spoke of Israel as His *special treasure*. (Deuteronomy 7:6-11; Exodus 19:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10)

Deuteronomy 7:6-11: ⁶Do this because **you belong to the LORD your God. From all the peoples on earth he chose you to be his own special people.**

⁷ “The LORD did not love you and choose you because you outnumbered other peoples; you were the smallest nation on earth. ⁸But the LORD loved you and wanted to keep the promise that he made to your ancestors. That is why he saved you by his great might and set you free from slavery to the king of Egypt.

⁹**Remember that the LORD your God is the only God and that he is faithful.** He will keep his covenant and show his constant love to a thousand generations of those who love him and obey his commands, ¹⁰but he will not hesitate to punish those who hate him. ¹¹So now, obey what you have been taught; obey all the laws that I have given you today.”—*Good News Bible*.*†

Exodus 19:5-6: ⁵ “Now, if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be **my own people**. The whole earth is mine, but you will be **my chosen people**, ⁶a people dedicated to me alone, and you will serve me as priests.”—*Good News Bible*.*†

22. In the New Testament, Peter used that same language to talk about the Christian church.

1 Peter 2:9-10: ⁹ But you are the chosen race, the King’s priests, the holy nation, God’s own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous [*sic-Br*] light. ¹⁰At one time you were not God’s people, but now you are his people; at one time you did not know God’s mercy, but now you have received his mercy.—*Good News Bible*.*

23. What does that mean? It meant/means that the children of Israel and Christians in modern times had/have a special relationship with God; and if they followed/follow His guidance, they would have been or will be blessed in all that they did/do.

[BSG:] The recounting of God’s great deeds on behalf of His people (*Ps. 135:8–13*) culminates in the promise that God will “judge” His people and have compassion on them (*Ps. 135:14*). The judgment here is God’s vindication of the oppressed and the destitute (*Ps. 9:4, Ps. 7:8, Ps. 54:1, Dan. 7:22*). The promise is that the Lord will uphold His people’s cause and defend them (*Deut. 32:36*). Thus, Psalm 135 aims to inspire God’s people to trust in the Lord and to remain faithful to their covenant with Him.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, March 7.^{‡§}

Psalm 9:4: You [God] are fair and honest in your judgements, and you have judged in my favour [*sic-Br*].—*Good News Bible*.*†

Psalm 7:8: You are the judge of the whole human race.

Judge in my favour [*sic-Br*], O LORD.—*Good News Bible*.*†

Psalm 54:1: Save me by your power, O God;

set me free by your might!—*Good News Bible*.*

Deuteronomy 32:36: “The LORD will rescue his people

when he sees that their strength is gone.

He will have mercy on those who serve him,

when he sees how helpless they are.”—*Good News Bible*.*

24. Psalm 135 tells us that there is no comparison between the idols worshiped by the pagans, and the almighty powerful God, *YAHWEH*, the God of Israel and of us.
25. Review the speech of Stephen recorded in Acts 7 and Paul’s summary of faithful people in Hebrews 11. As a result of that speech, Stephen was stoned to death. But, Paul’s conscience was awakened, and he ended up spending his life preaching the gospel to Gentiles and, finally, having his head cut off.
26. As Seventh-day Adventists, we need to do the same thing that God challenged the people of Israel to do in ancient times. We need to review and learn from our history.

[EGW:] **We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.**—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White** 196.2.†‡

[BSG] For God’s people to go forward fearlessly, they need to know the facts of their history. Ellen G. White advises believers to read Psalms 105 and 106 “at least once every week.”—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, March 8.‡§

[EGW:] The experience of Israel, referred to in the above words by the apostle, and as recorded in the one hundred fifth and one hundred sixth psalms [Psalms 105 & 106], contains lessons of warning that the people of God in these last days especially need to study. **I urge that these chapters be read at least once every week.**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers** 98.2-99.0.†‡

27. Think about your personal experience with the church and with God in the 21st century. Ask yourself these questions:
 1. [BSG:] What are the blessings of remembering God’s faithful leading of His people in history? What are the consequences of forgetting or ignoring the lessons of the past? How can we apply that same principle to us, as a church called to do the same thing that ancient Israel had been called to do?
 2. How do the Psalms encourage us to recognize God’s providential care in our life and to exercise patience and trust in God’s sovereign ways, even when it’s not easy to understand why things are happening as they are?
 3. How can we make the study of the history of God’s people more prominent in our personal and communal worship services? How can we be more intentional in telling our children about the more recent history of God’s people?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, March 8.‡

28. So, what should we have learned from this lesson?

[BSG:] The holy Scriptures are not a book of philosophy filled with human conjecture regarding God's attributes and teachings. **The Bible is the Lord's action in human history from the beginning of time.** Through these events, we may learn who He is and what His plans are for humanity. Many critics of Scripture stumble on this biblical truth. They cannot accept the idea that God is working in human history. They reject the notion that the Creator is involved in human affairs. To acknowledge His involvement would be tantamount to admitting that He is the Ruler of the universe and the rightful Lord and Sovereign of every human being; and, as such, we must accept His kingship and His law. The last thing the selfish heart wishes to recognize is God's claims upon his or her allegiance or divine authority over human life.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 132.†‡

29. **The Bible is full of stories. It really is His story—God's story.** These stories are not just for our entertainment or for entertaining our children; they are the backbone of Scripture.

[EGW:] In the annals of human history the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as dependent on the will and prowess of man. The shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. **But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, behind, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.**—Ellen G. White, *Education** 173.2.†‡

30. These stories are meant to teach us about God. What we learn about Abraham and Moses and David are interesting things; but, **the real story is about God.**

[BSG:] From Genesis to Revelation, we see the story of Redemption. Everything the Lord has done has been for the purpose of saving lost souls. We see this purpose in the content of the Bible itself: it is a book of the history of salvation. While 21 books of the Bible are narrative in nature, or composed of stories, the remainder of the books—whether prophecy, poetry, wisdom, apocalyptic literature, pastoral, or personal epistle—also relate to, or contain, stories or history.

The Scriptures in their entirety are based on the understanding that their Author is alive and moving through, or intervening in, earthly events. The power of the Bible's message resides in this fact. When we learn, for instance, that God controls the sea, the winds, the big fish, the vine, and the worm in Jonah's story, we know that these four chapters are no mere novella of an obscure nature writer, scrawled thousands of centuries ago. **If the Bible teaches us anything, it is that the Creator rules over natural forces, then and now.** Remove the historicity from Scripture, and we will have religious tales without the power to impact our current lives. Unfortunately, this situation is just what we see transpiring in our society today. The Bible denounces such secular thinking and **affirms that not only does the Lord work in history but He also has dynamic and salvific relationships with His creatures.**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 132-133.†‡

[BSG:] **An interesting feature of the Scriptures is that historical events are often narrated in the form of poetry as well as in prose.** We usually have this preconceived idea—no doubt conditioned by the study of secular literature within our given culture—that history should be written only in a formal style of prose. In most societies today, poetry is reserved for the expression of emotions and is not considered the suitable domain of serious writing or for the subject matter of historians.

But the Holy Writ defies any such literary restriction or classification. Just compare Exodus 14 and 15. Both chapters talk about the miraculous parting of the Red Sea but use different literary forms to do so. The account in chapter 14 is rendered in prose while the account in chapter 15 is rendered in poetry. We find the same technique employed in Judges 4 and 5 in the record of the victory of Deborah and Barak over Jabin, king of Hazor, and his armies. Chapter 4 is written in prose while chapter 5 is rendered in poetry. The comparisons between the prose and poetic accounts of the same events are instructive; we should not dismiss historical events in the Psalms as less than “historical” or authentic simply because they are rendered through poetry. Poetry is a legitimate form of expression that the Bible writers used, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to appeal to and affirm the faith of the believer in God’s actions.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 133.†‡

31. As one might guess, the story of the plagues on Egypt, the exodus, and all that God did for Israel is the central theme of much of this discussion. That theme was repeated when the children of Israel were brought back from Babylonian captivity to reestablish themselves in Canaan once again.
32. Again, these stories were intended not just for our entertainment but also we are to learn from them and teach them and the lessons they teach to our children.

Psalm 78:2-4: I will open my mouth in a parable;

I will utter dark sayings of old,

Which we have heard and known,

And our fathers have told us.

We will not hide *them* from their children,

Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,

And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.—*New King James Version.**§

[BSG:] In ancient Israel, parents educated their children by reciting to them the actions of the God of their forefathers. Time after time, the command is given to parents to repeat those deeds of salvation—the slaying of the firstborn males in Egypt (*Exod. 13:14–16*), the miracles of the Exodus (*Deut. 6:20–25*), and the crossing of the Jordan River (*Josh. 4:20–24*)—to their children. Such recitation involved more than simply memorizing statements and laws. Rather, **implicit in this form of education is the idea that a strong grasp of history was the best way for the next generation to preserve their parents’ faith.**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 134.†‡§

Exodus 13:14-16: ¹⁴ “In the future, when your son asks what this observance means, you will answer him, ‘By using great power the LORD brought us out of Egypt, the place where we were slaves. ¹⁵When the king of Egypt was stubborn and refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, both human and animal. That is why we sacrifice every firstborn male animal to the LORD, but buy back our firstborn sons. ¹⁶This observance will be a reminder, like something tied on our hands or on our foreheads; **it will remind us that the LORD brought us out of Egypt by his great power.**’”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

[BSG:] There is intentionality in the commands to teach our children. We should teach the events of salvation history to our kids in as many different, and interesting, ways as possible. Scripture and the testimonies of Jesus alike warn us that the enemy is doing his utmost to deceive minds, especially those of scholars, and to cause them to reject the historicity of the Scriptures. If Satan can convince us that the Bible is only tales, many believers will be dragged into unbelief and, by default, will turn aside to the all-absorbing pleasures of this world.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 134-135.‡

33. When all is said and done, we need to learn important lessons about God and about our sacred past—our history. To remember that God is our Creator and the one who has saved us through so many trials in the past should remind us that God also plans to bring all things into judgment.

[BSG:] “For the LORD will judge His people” (*Ps. 135:14, NKJV*) is one of the most important themes of Psalm 135. In this song, the psalmist emphasizes God’s deliverance of His people from the bondage of Egypt (*Ps. 135:8–14*). However, the deliverance of God’s people is not only a judgment against Egypt but also results in the vindication of God’s people. We usually conceive of punishment as the result of judgment, but this psalm reminds us that God’s judgments bestow blessings and favor on His faithful people. The Exodus is the quintessential manifestation of this truth.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 136.‡§

34. In summary, notice these points:

1. [BSG:] The Lord is a personal God. Additionally, the Lord of the Old Testament is intimately involved in the affairs of human beings.
2. God acts even today; if He acted on behalf of His people in the past, there’s no reason He cannot do the same for His people today. It’s our privilege to see His deeds in our daily life.
3. Every event of human existence—our personal experiences, the actions and decisions of our church, the government of our country—is in His hands. Everything is controlled and guided by Him.

Praise the Lord that our God is a real Person and our Friend!—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 136.‡

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